

DAILY BULLETIN

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UNITED STATES WANTS UNITED NATIONS IN DARFUR BEFORE 2007

“The sooner the U.N. takes control, the better,” U.S. envoy Bolton says 1

U.S. WORKS WITH UNITED NATIONS FOR EAST TIMOR PEACE, STABILITY

East Timor among largest recipients of U.S. aid 2

WORLD COMMUNITY MUST STEM TIDE OF SMALL ARMS, OFFICIAL SAYS

United States brings a “positive agenda” to U.N. conference on illicit weapons..... 3

U.S. PLEDGES FULL SUPPORT FOR MIDDLE EAST DEMOCRATIZATION

State’s Welch says U.S. accepts Islamic parties, rejects radicalism 4

UNITED STATES WANTS UNITED NATIONS IN DARFUR BEFORE 2007

“The sooner the U.N. takes control, the better,” U.S. envoy Bolton says

By Judy Aita
Washington File UN Correspondent

The United States will continue to press for the handover of the African Union peacekeeping mission in Darfur to the United Nations before the end of 2006, U.S. Ambassador John Bolton said June 27.

The U.N. target for taking over the peacekeeping operations in Darfur is January 2007, but Bolton said “the handover can and should take place before that.”

“In the meantime we will work to strengthen the existing AMIS [African Union Mission in Sudan] mission,” he said. “But we think the sooner the U.N. takes control of the mission in Darfur the better.”

Bolton spoke with journalists after U.N. Under Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Marie Guéhenno privately briefed the council on his recent assessment mission to Sudan.

Guéhenno said that given the fragility of the situation in Darfur “it would be wise” to have a substantial force on the ground consisting of three brigades of three to five battalions each by January 2007.

In the meantime, he said, the United Nations should immediately strengthen the African Union force

with communications, transport and other help such as strengthening command and control capabilities in anticipation of the U.N. takeover.

“The situation in Darfur remains very fragile -- there is an agreement and that’s a major achievement, but it’s an agreement that opens a window and that’s a window that needs to be seized,” Guéhenno told journalists after the meeting. A solid military presence could also address the situation in Chad, where allegations by both countries of cross-border incursions are growing increasingly worrisome, he said.

Although Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir has stated that he will not accept a U.N. peacekeeping force, Guéhenno said that the United Nations still can augment the 7,000-strong African Union operation.

“We believe that the United Nations can help the African mission. We did not get any objection from the government of Sudan, so we are going to work in earnest on that,” he said.

Secretary-General Kofi Annan said that he will be meeting al-Bashir at an African Union summit on July 1, along with other African leaders. “I hope the collective pressure will make a difference,” he said.

Annan said that he also appealed to the Security Council “to bring their collective and individual pressure to bear not just on the Sudanese government to cooperate and support the deployment, but also on the rebels that are outside the agreement to sign the agreement and pressure both parties to implement in good faith what they have agreed to do” in the Abuja peace agreement.

The Darfur Peace Agreement, signed in Abuja, Nigeria, on May 5 between the government of Sudan and the principal rebel group, the Sudan Liberation Movement, provides for detailed, verifiable steps to disarm and neutralize the Jingaweit and other armed militia groups, and opens the way for economic recovery and integration of the former combatants and people of Darfur into the political process.

Bolton said that Guéhenno’s briefing “shows how difficult a mission this is going to be, particularly if we don’t overcome the opposition from the government in Khartoum as well as trying to find cooperation from the various rebel groups -- those that signed the Darfur peace agreement and those who didn’t.”

The U.S. ambassador said the African Union’s desire to turn the mission over to the United Nations “is unambiguous.”

“It is the responsibility of the AU leaders to bring Sudan into compliance with their own commitment under the Darfur peace agreement,” Bolton said.

The Sudanese president’s position “is obviously contrary to the obligations he undertook in the Darfur peace agreement,” Bolton continued. But the Security Council “will try to overcome that first through discussions ... then consider resolutions or what other steps we might take here.”

U.S. WORKS WITH UNITED NATIONS FOR EAST TIMOR PEACE, STABILITY

East Timor among largest recipients of U.S. aid

By Jane Morse
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- The Bush administration is working diligently with the international community and the United Nations to address the immense challenges confronting East Timor, says Eric John, deputy assistant secretary of state for East Asia and the Pacific.

“Our goals are clear,” John said at a June 28 hearing before the House International Relations Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, “we want to work with the international community and the U.N. to help East Timor overcome its immediate challenges and assist the young nation in becoming a stable and prosperous democracy in Southeast Asia.”

On a per-capita basis, John said, East Timor has been one of the largest recipients of U.S. aid. The United States, he added, also has contributed almost \$500 million to the country via the U.N. mission in the East Timor.

East Timor, after a great deal of destructive violence and bloodshed, won its independence from Indonesia in May 2002, but the fledgling nation continues to be plagued by political instability, John said.

Earlier in 2006, the country suffered more upheaval when the commander of East Timor's Defense Force dismissed 591 striking soldiers who were protesting alleged discrimination within the military ranks by soldiers from the eastern parts of the country against those from the west.

As the situation deteriorated, President Xanana Gusmao took control of the Timorese military and police forces and, after consulting with the Council of State, the government of East Timor invited security forces from Australia, Portugal, Malaysia and New Zealand to re-establish order in the country. There are now approximately 2,700 foreign military and police forces in East Timor, mostly under Australian command. These forces substantially have restored order to the country, John reported.

The events exacerbated tensions between Gusmao and then-Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri, who was forced to resign for mishandling the security crisis, as well as allegations that he had authorized the distribution of arms to "militants" of the ruling FRETILIN Party, John said.

Alkatiri resisted calls for his resignation, but submitted a letter of resignation June 26. Gusmao is expected to name a transitional government within the next few days, John said. The mission of the peacekeeping forces in East Timor has been extended until August 20, he said.

"The U.S. is working with East Timor's numerous bilateral donors and friends to determine how best to assist it during this crisis," John said. "We are consulting with them on the mandate of a successor U.N. mission requested by the government of East Timor."

According to John, a U.N. successor mission should include "a robust electoral assistance program, a strong police component and civilian and human rights advisers."

Proper police training, he said, will be important because only a professional and impartial police force can obtain the support of the Timorese people.

The United Nations has dispatched a team to East Timor to assess the country's needs and make recommendations to U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan. After receiving a report from the secretary-general, U.N. Security Council members will determine the mandate of a proposed successor-UN mission, John said.

The U.S. Agency for International Development has an office in East Timor and is focused on building democracy and good governance, economic growth and development, and health care. "We will need to take a fresh look at these programs in light of the weaknesses exposed by the current instability in East Timor," John said.

John's testimony (PDF, 3 pages) is available on the House International Relations Committee Web site: http://wwwa.house.gov/international_relations/109/joh062806.pdf

WORLD COMMUNITY MUST STEM TIDE OF SMALL ARMS, OFFICIAL SAYS

United States brings a "positive agenda" to U.N. conference on illicit weapons

By Judy Aita
Washington File UN Correspondent

United Nations -- The international community must act to stem the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, a senior U.S. arms control official said June 27.

Outlining the U.S. position during the opening of the two-week U.N. Small Arms Review Conference, Robert Joseph, under secretary of state for arms control and international security, said that the United States has a "positive agenda" for action and hopes to make "an effective contribution to stopping the international illicit trade in small arms and light weapons."

The United States supports "aggressive steps to implement the recently concluded agreement on the marking and tracing of weapons, effective controls on weapons transfers -- both import and export -- as well as robust end-user certifications, strengthening controls over international brokers; effective stockpile management of weapons under state control; and the destruction of government-declared surplus and illicit weapons," Joseph said.

The United States is one of fewer than a dozen countries that have shown progress in implementing all aspects of the program of action adopted in 2001, he said. Its

system of laws and regulations requires all firearms to be marked when they are manufactured or imported, documentation on third-party transfers and an end-use monitoring system. The U.S. government has jurisdiction over all U.S. weapons and citizens involved in the arms trade, no matter where they are located, he added.

The U.S. official said that the conference must focus on effective programs to stem illicit weapons flows across national borders and prevent rogue regimes or states known to support terrorists from acquiring illicit small arms and light weapons.

But balance is needed, he emphasized. While supporting curbs on the illicit weapons trade, the United States would not tolerate any effort by the conference to overstep its mandate and deny law-abiding citizens their right to bear arms in accordance with their national traditions, Joseph said.

“The United States will not agree to any provisions restricting civilian possession, use, or legal trade of firearms inconsistent with our laws and practices,” he said.

What is necessary, Joseph said, is the will to overcome “political impediments to implement what has already been agreed upon” and “the courage to take meaningful, but sometimes difficult, actions today that will prevent serious adverse consequences tomorrow.”

The conference, he said, must focus on practical proposals to strengthen the program of action and not be sidetracked into discussions of the collateral effects of the illicit arms trade.

The U.S. is willing to consider language in the final document that “encourages the adoption of a set of principles on arms transfers,” Joseph said, but such principles must be focused and address practical and effective ways to deal with illicit trade.

The United States has already assisted 25 countries in the destruction of surplus and illicit weapons and ammunition and Joseph said that he recently endorsed plans for similar programs in four additional African nations.

The conference, officially known as the United Nations Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the Program of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects, runs from June 26 to July 7.

U.S. PLEDGES FULL SUPPORT FOR MIDDLE EAST DEMOCRATIZATION

State's Welch says U.S. accepts Islamic parties, rejects radicalism

By David Shelby
Washington File Staff Writer

Houston - The United States is committed to supporting democratic reforms in the Arab world, even if they produce election results that the U.S. government does not favor, according to Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs David Welch.

“We understand that there may be outcomes with which we are uncomfortable. We strongly support democracy, but we also reserve the right, as a government, to have a policy that contradicts the objectives of a particular political party, even if that political party was fairly elected,” Welch told participants in a panel discussion on political Islam and democracy at the U.S.-Arab Economic Forum in Houston June 27.

Welch said that the presence of real political alternatives would ultimately undermine the appeal of radicalism. He said the United States is not opposed to dealing with Islamic political parties in principle.

“We should recognize that the concept of political Islam represents a broad diversity of views within the Arab and Islamic worlds. We should remind ourselves that violent jihadi groups form a very small minority among Islamist groups. The majority in many cases are legal Islamist political parties,” he said.

The assistant secretary added that the United States has constructive dialogues with Islamist parties in Kuwait, Morocco, Turkey and Indonesia. He said American and foreign laws prevent the U.S. government from dealing with certain Islamic political groups. By law, the U.S. administration cannot have dealings with parties considered to be terrorist organizations, and it will not engage groups that are not recognized as legitimate political parties under their own domestic laws.

Welch said that the demand for democratic reforms is rising in the Arab world and that change is inevitable. “With this mounting pressure, governments across the region face important challenges: do they find ways to accommodate these demands or do they attempt to stifle them?” he asked.

He said that the change should be peaceful but that “it’s up to the leaders of the region to provide a vision for the future that mobilizes people and offers hope.”

Saudi Ambassador to the United States Prince Turki Al Faisal affirmed that democratic principles are entirely compatible with Islam. “According to Islamic tradition and practice, self-legislation and interpretation of law and imposition of law is part and parcel of Islamic practice,” he said. “You have the divine message from God, and you have the words of the Prophet, Peace Be Upon Him, and then it’s for the rest of us to interpret what those words mean.”

The ambassador added that Saudi Arabia does not consider Islamic political parties appropriate. “Once you put a brand called ‘Islam’ on a political party, then by the nature of that branding, you’re excluding the others from Islam,” he said. The formation of Islamic political parties fosters the attitude that certain people have special access to God while others do not, he said.

Assistant Secretary Welch said the goal of the U.S. reform policy in the Arab world is to help build “strong institutions politically, economically and educationally so there can be an environment in which there is stable political competition and an informed population that can make a choice between what is legitimate and what is illegitimate in political expression.”

He said democracy would take different forms in different countries but that it should have universal characteristics, such as freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom of association, freedom of the press, rule of law, protection of minorities, and rotation of power.

Arab League Secretary-General Amre Moussa pointed out that democracy is not a new concept in the Arab world, where some countries had democratic institutions as early as the nineteenth century. He said most of these institutions fell victim to the pressures of Cold War politics in the late twentieth century but that voices within the Arab world have been demanding government reforms since the fall of the Soviet Union.

He said the Arab League, through its 2004 Tunis Declaration, is leading the drive for democracy and political transparency in the Arab world.

The U.S.-Arab Economic Forum was founded in 2003 as a means of facilitating dialogue between the United States and the Arab world.

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